

## INTRODUCTION

P. BION GRIFFIN AND MUS HULISELAN  
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AND UNIVERSITAS PATTIMURA

*Cakalele*, the Sago Project, the University of Hawai‘i, and Universitas Pattimura are bound together in a cooperative relationship of long endurance and in a love of Maluku. In 1991, faculty and students of the University of Hawai‘i, led by James T. Collins, traveled to Ambon and Universitas Pattimura to meet with counterpart faculty and students, led by (then) Rector Dr. Ir. J. L. Nanere and (now) Rector Dr. Mus Huliselan. The several days of meetings led to the creation of a formal exchange relationship between the two universities and to the design and implementation of the Sago Project, a research program investigating the cultural, ecological, and developmental aspects of the sago palm. During the rainy season (American summer months) of 1992 and 1993, teams of University of Hawai‘i and Universitas Pattimura (UnPatti) faculty and students began a collaborative research endeavor that continues through the time of this writing in 1997.

The exchange program and research project were made possible by a grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, explicitly given for cooperative research. During the initial visit of the Hawai‘i team to UnPatti, Rector Nanere suggested a joint research endeavor focusing on the place of the sago palm in the life of the people of Maluku. He pointed out its importance in the economy and subsistence of all the natives, and its ambiguous place in the economy of the transmigrants found throughout the central part of the province. The project, entitled “The Sago Palm: Cultural, Ecological and Developmental Implications,” joined anthropologists, geographers, nutritionists, linguists, and botanists in an attempt to better understand sago and its uses and meanings for the people of Maluku.

Jim Collins continued his long-standing linguistic research, seeking to finalize his dictionary of the Bacan language and providing a comparative glossary of sago-related vocabularies. Jon Goss combined his interest in transmigrant communities and indigenous Seramese people to begin studying the economic systems of both in the transmigrant community of

Waihatu and along coastal western Seram. Rachel Novotny led a team of University of Hawai'i and Universitas Pattimura nutrition-oriented researchers who also worked in coastal Waihatu and Lohiatala, an Alune village slightly into the interior (see Map).

Several undergraduate students and junior faculty (*dosen*) at Universitas Pattimura and a few graduate students from the University of Hawai'i joined the program, participating as trainees, as student researchers, and as colleagues. After training workshops that performed initial tests of the research survey instruments in Ambon and later on Seram, teams of fieldworkers amassed economic, environmental, social, health and nutritional data.

While these data are not yet ready for publication, visits to the nearby village of Lohiatala during the 1992 research period led to follow-up work in 1993 and 1994. Rachel Novotny, assisted by Fred Rumatatu of UnPatti, directed this research into health and nutrition among the Lohiatala people. Their findings are reported in this issue of *Cakalele*.

In 1994, University of Hawai'i graduate students Fooi Ling Ng and Kyle Latinis collected data on women and on subsistence at Lohiatala, Kairatu District, Seram. Ng completed an M.S. thesis in nutritional sciences studying methodology for assessing diet in the region, while Latinis developed his interests in forest use at that time. His paper in this volume discusses the forest phalanger (*cuscus*) as hunted by Lohiatala men. In the future, Latinis will be researching the full range of forest use by western Seram villagers of Alune ethnicity. He has pointed out that while the sago palm is a central plant in Seram subsistence, a multitude of other near-village and forest plants are extremely important and often utilized.

An innovative approach to understanding traditional plant use has been to look at the historical and archaeological record. Latinis and Ken Stark report archaeological research that resulted in Stark's doctoral dissertation. Stark completed surveys and excavations on the islands of Ambon, Buru, and Seram, aiming to provide an overview of variation in use of plant and animal resources over time and space. Excavating in an arid rockshelter on Buru and a wet forest location on Ambon, he suggests the possibility of considerable variation in use of plants. While many plant remains are not preserved in any but the driest contexts, Stark's consideration of stone tool characteristics indicate long-term similarities in the use of *Canarium* nuts on coastal Ambon.

Linda Crowder, a student at the University of Hawai'i, participated in the program in 1993, pursuing her interest in traditional healers, or *dukun*, on the island of Bacan. Her contribution introduces her preliminary research by focusing on two practitioners, one Christian and one Muslim, in their social contexts. Glenn Dolcemascolo, also a student at Hawai'i, traveled through much of western Maluku surveying sago use. As part of his activities, he briefly visited the Aru islands. In this volume he reports insights he gained concerning variation among the citizens of Aru in their relationships with their environment. He is especially interested in the permutations found in the nature and application of *sasi*, a traditional custom for controlling exploitation of various resources. He integrates notions of ethnic origins in Aru with the operation of the social system and its practices today, suggesting a very dynamic set of cultural practices.

Nina Etkin, Lisa Gollin, Doksy Binnendyk, and Hermien Sospelisa report a portion of their research related to the overall goals of the Sago Project, specifically issues of health and medicine. Etkin and Gollin, specializing in ethnomedicine at the University of Hawai'i, pay special attention here to medicinal plants as reported from the village of Lohiatata in western Seram.

Sago is still central to the University of Hawai'i and Universitas Pattimura joint research program, although the research reported to date has taken many side trips, and several sago related inquiries remain unfinished and unreported. Charles Lamoureux of the University of Hawai'i has collected specimens for eventual genetic DNA analyses aimed at determining if native classifications and ideas of variation correspond with both scientific taxonomic assignments and genetically revealed characteristics. Griffin continues his anthropological interests in sago and the foods of Maluku, while Latinis is researching forest foods over a full seasonal cycle. Jon Goss continues his geographical research on indigenous and transmigrant communities in western Seram. Mus Huliselan, Fred Rumatatu, and Jules Pattiselano continue to participate in coordinating and completing research.

Directions for future research by participants in the joint Sago Project and by independent researchers in Maluku may be suggested from our collective knowledge gained to date. A deeper understanding of the embeddedness of sago in Maluku culture and life is still to be gained. Variation in time and place is largely anecdotal, although numerous narrowly focused papers from many disciplines speak to the nature of sago.

The initial interest of Prof. Nanere is still to be rewarded; the impact of the transformation of sago swamps into rice fields demands longitudinal and comparative research that the Sago Project has only begun. The pervasive reach of sago in Malukan cultures and societies will be initially investigated by Kyle Latinis in his upcoming Seram research, but will necessarily be incomplete, since he must focus on a limited number of Alune communities there.

One strength of the program to date lies in its collection of economic, nutritional, and health data. These domains may well be more deeply explored, along with the wider place of sago and food in central Malukan people. The interrelationships of marine and terrestrial foods, and of imported and nontraditional foods, also need exploration. While Maluku is well integrated into the Indonesian economy and society, the value of many local resources in maintaining of the well-being of the people continues to be largely underestimated.

Another desirable goal is to further increase the effective integration of the University of Hawai'i and Universitas Pattimura educational, training, and research agenda. The summers of 1992 and 1993 were especially fruitful in the cooperation and field involvement of a large number of students and faculty. As the program matures and research becomes both more precisely focused and broadly directed, both the academic and the local communities may gain more benefit.

**Figure 1. *Tumang sago*, wet sago extracted from the pith of the sago palm.**

(Photo by R. Novotny, 1991, Ambon)

**Figure 2. Dried sago flour and *forno*, for baking sago *lempeng*.**  
(Photo by R. Novotny, 1993, Bacan)

**Figure 3. Sago *lempeng*.**  
(Photo by R. Novotny, 1993, Bacan)

**Figure 4. *Papeda* (sago gel).**  
(Photo by R. Novotny, 1991, Ambon)

**Figure 5. A sago palm tree.**  
(Photo by R. Novotny, 1991, Ambon)